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## **An Evaluation of Translation Quality Assessment Course: Voices from Instructors**

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### **Abstract**

Evaluation in educational setting is a process of collecting and analyzing information about teaching and learning in order to make decisions that enhance student achievement and the success of programs (Genesee 2002; Genesee and Upshur 1996; Rea-Dickins & Germaine 1993). Program evaluation is essential to successful education, but to date, such evaluative studies are notably lacking in our country. Although evaluation approaches recognize instructors as reflective and self-motivated professionals for curriculum planning, development and evaluation, their knowledge and experience have not been duly voiced in such areas. Thus, this paper aimed to evaluate the official curriculum of Translation Studies at M.A. level from the perspective of the instructors in charge of implementing it. Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) which is one of the key courses of Translation Studies at M.A. level was selected as the subject of this research owing to its critical significance in the program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six expert/instructors (PhD) who taught this course at 3 universities of Iran in 2010-2011. The qualitative and detailed content analysis of the interviews showed that there is a broad consensus that the current curriculum suffers from many weaknesses in need of revision. Almost all instructors emphasized that students' needs should be taken into account in the process of curriculum development and that the curriculum should be modified profoundly in order to address issues, concepts, and concerns intimately related to TQA rather than language assessment.

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## 1. Introduction

Language curriculum development is concerned with principles and procedures for the planning delivery, management, and assessment of teaching and learning. “Curriculum development processes in language teaching comprise needs analysis, goal setting, syllabus design, methodology, and testing and evaluation” (Richards, 1995, p. 1). Evaluation is an integral and complex part of any curriculum development project that requires collection and synthesis of multiple streams of data. Curriculum evaluation is a kind of study that has the potential to illuminate and ensure the value, quality and effectiveness of the course curriculum. Such evaluative studies are often intended to seek what should be changed and thus improve the quality of education. The recommendations that result from such studies can help decision makers and curriculum developers to “recognize potential improvements from what is to what should be” (Knox, 2002, p. 7). Avoiding any assessment and redevelopment of the curriculum leads to an inability to improve the effectiveness and quality of the education (Fink, 2003).

In regard to emerging disciplines such as Translation Studies (TS), the issues related to curriculum development become more vital. Policy makers and curriculum developers can ensure the quality of TS majors at different levels by constantly searching for program improvement through course and curriculum evaluation. It, thus, entails an evaluation of TS curriculums as an important research activity for promoting progress. Rezvani and Vakilinejad (in press) have documented the course and curriculum evaluation as “an opportunity for identifying the deficiencies in translator education and attending carefully to the quality of education as well as to the improvement of students’ knowledge and skills”.

In Iran, the official curriculums of all university majors were developed and established by Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. In this context, the main question is whether these curriculums accommodate students’ needs to produce desired and intended outcomes and whether they fulfil instructors’ expectations. Curriculum developers’ reliance solely on their own experience and expertise might not be healthy and thus helpful for the students. An ideal course should respond to students’ learning needs while conveying the theoretical rigor of the topics from the instructors’ and curriculum developers’ points of view (Jeong, 2012). Hence, a careful analysis and detailed assessment of current curriculums are essential to know how effective it is to help students.

While the official curriculum of each major should be followed as a main source of what should be taught and learned in the class, it is often the course instructors who play a more central role in the classroom. The key transaction of teaching takes place with instructors (Innes, 2004). Thus, because of their first-hand experience with students and their unique opportunity to observe and measure the influence of the curriculum on students’ knowledge and skills, course instructors are the ones who can best answer the question of whether the course curriculum can generate the intended outcomes, and if it not, how it can be improved.

This study seeks to discover the degree to which the current curriculum of TQA course is beneficial to students from instructors’ perspectives. The purpose of the study is to provide reflective attitudes of course instructors about the aspects of the curriculum that are in need of modification. The end result of the study is to improve the quality of the course by highlighting weaknesses of the curriculum and to offer some recommendations as to how to enhance its quality.

## 2. Review of literature

Curriculum studies “has emerged from an attempt to study education and to explore educational problems in their own right and not as philosophical problems or as psychological or sociological phenomena” (Kelly, 2004, p. 18). Richards (2001) stated that curriculum development in language teaching really began in the 1960s. According to him, curriculum development refers to “the range of planning and implementation processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum. These processes focus on needs analysis, situational analysis, planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching materials, providing for effective teaching, and evaluation” (Richards, 2001, p. 41). The literature on the subject of curriculum development contains several frameworks and

models which define the steps that should be considered in curriculum and program development. Although the models and frameworks of curriculum and program development differ in “how they lay out the various steps, which steps they break into separate parts and which they lump together, and similar matters (Fink, 2003, p. 63), in most of these models, the design process includes a number of common elements – assessment and analysis of students’ needs, identification of the educational goals and objectives, selection of learning activities, evaluation and so on. However, evaluation is the key and inseparable part of almost all curriculum development models. Evaluation is “the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants’ attitudes within a context of particular institutions involved” (Brown, 1989 as cited in Weir & Roberts, 1994, p. 4). “The essence of most evaluations is making judgment based on evidence about the worth and effectiveness of aspects of education programs ... in a way that encourages stakeholder use of conclusions for the purpose of planning, improvement, and accountability” (Knox, 2002, p. 8).

According to Genesee (2002), evaluation in TESOL can be defined as “the purposeful collection of information to assist decision-making about teaching and learning in ESL/EFL classrooms and programmes” (p. 150). He stressed that evaluation and assessment are often used interchangeably, but they are different. He clarified the distinction between these two terms as follows:

Assessment of an individual students’ progress or achievement is an important component of evaluation: it is that part of evaluation that includes the collection and analysis of information about student learning. The primary focus of assessment in TESOL has been language assessment and the role of tests in assessing students’ language skills. Evaluation goes beyond student achievement (and language assessment) to consider all aspects of teaching and learning, and to look at how educational decisions can be informed by the results of alternative forms of assessment (Genesee, 2002, p. 145).

He asserted that evaluation has different purposes, namely accountability, making placement, advancement/promotion or related decisions, guiding classroom instruction and enhancing student learning (ibid.). He considered that classroom-based evaluation is “a tool that teachers can use to hone decision-making skills for the benefit of students” (ibid., 150). Genesee affirmed that classroom-based evaluation is concerned with questions about: “Suitability of general instructional goals and objectives associated with individual lesson or unit plans, effectiveness of instructional methods, materials and activities used to attain instructional objectives, and adequacy of professional resources required to deliver instruction” (ibid., 146).

Torres (2010) stressed that in education, evaluation serves two primary purposes: “accountability or summative evaluation; improvement or formative evaluation” (p. 746). Formative evaluation “provides information about how a program or organization operates and how to improve it” (ibid.). This type of evaluation “done for the purpose of improvement focusing on implementation and process” and it is conducted while the program under study is ongoing or in the development stage (Mathison, 2010, p. 792). Summative evaluation “provides information about the overall effectiveness, impact, and/or outcomes of a program” (Torres, 2010, p. 746). This type of evaluation serves accountability purposes and focuses on outcomes and effects. It is conducted when the program under study is completed or is in its final form (Mathison, 2010).

According to Klenowski (2010) there are four types of evaluation: illuminative, naturalistic, portrayal and transactional evaluation. Illuminative evaluation “uses naturalistic methods to identify underlying factors and issues important to participants. (Klenowski, 2010, p. 335). Naturalistic evaluation includes the use of qualitative methods for the “collection and analysis of data generally to complement the evaluation design” (ibid.). Portrayal evaluation uses qualitative data to provide description of evaluation context and participants (Klenowski, 2010). Finally, transactional evaluation “provides data about the process and exchanges between the evaluator and the participants” (ibid., p. 335).

Thus curriculum evaluation is part of curriculum research (Kelly, 2004). “Curriculum evaluation is clearly the

process by which we attempt to gauge the value and effectiveness of any particular piece of educational activity” (ibid, p. 137). “Evaluation of curriculum involves determining the value or worth of particular products or processes that can include learning objectives, documents, or experiences for the purposes of informing decision making about the curriculum” (Klenowski, 2010, p. 335). Curriculum evaluation “as a research topic is of considerable potential value and importance in translator education, but unfortunately it is often missed by those who examine translators’ knowledge and performance” (Rezvani & Vakilinejad, in press). Unfortunately, missing, to date, have been sufficient published curriculum evaluation studies in TS discipline – at least in our country. The current researchers believe that given the lack of evaluative studies in our educational context there is a need for empirical research studies on curricular effectiveness. To the best knowledge of the authors, there is only one published survey regarding effectiveness of TQA course in universities of Iran. This study done by Rezvani, Farahzad & Vakilinejad (2012) looked into the effectiveness of TQA Course curriculum from students’ points of view. In a survey with 38 M.A. students who took this course, the study found that the learners were the least satisfied with TQA course. The present study will investigate the course instructors’ viewpoints about the current curriculum of TQA course with the ultimate goal of providing a guideline for the enhancement of the course.

### 3. Design of the study

As stated above, this exploratory qualitative research was intended to look into the official curriculum of TQA as one of the key courses of TS at M.A. level in Iranian universities. First, we analyzed the curriculum of this course by conducting content analysis. Then, a qualitative semi-structured interview was developed. Three experts of TS (Ph.D. holders) reviewed the interview items and commented on its content, appropriateness and clarity. The interview questions were revised following the feedback provided by the experts. Final version of the interview consisted of 10 questions and lasted between 15 to 20 minutes. The sample for the study consisted of six instructors (Ph.D.) from three universities who have experienced teaching of the course.

### 4. Findings of the study

#### 4.1. Content analysis of TQA course curriculum

TQA is one of the key courses of M.A. level of TS which is taught as a 2-credit course spanning one semester. According to the official curriculum established by Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, this course is aimed to address the following areas:

- General concepts of language testing (LT)
- Features of a normal test such as validity and reliability
- Theories of language testing
- Methods of testing in translation
- Unresolved issues of language testing
- Tests of progress in teaching and learning of translation

The content analysis of the curriculum informed that it focuses mainly on the issues of language testing and it is also profoundly theoretical in nature with little concern with practice in the related areas.

#### 4.2. Interview results

The data from the interviews with the instructors were transcribed and content-analyzed to extract their main attitudes and ideas. The key findings are summarized below.

##### 4.2.1. Attitudes towards course objectives

The first three items of the interview were designed to elicit data on the course objectives. Table one summarizes the

instructors' opinions about course objectives. As this table shows, 4 instructors said that this curriculum includes only some of the necessary objectives and 2 instructors stated that it does not include necessary objectives. Also, a majority of instructors believed that this curriculum includes some irrelevant and inappropriate objectives. They suggested different course objectives to be included as appropriate. Instructor A and F said that concepts and principles of TQA and assessment should be considered as the objectives of this course. Instructors B and D thought that it is better to consider both TQA and LT as objectives of this course. Instructor E emphasized the importance of LT and considered it as the main objective. And finally, instructor C believed that theories and concepts of TQA should be considered as the main course objective.

Table 1. Instructors' attitudes about course objectives

	Instructor A	Instructor B	Instructor C	Instructor D	Instructor E	Instructor F
Inclusion of all necessary objectives	Not at all	To some extent	No	To some extent	Yes	no
Existence of irrelevant objective	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Your own objective for this course	Concepts & theories of assessment & TQA	theories & principles of LT & TQA	Theories & models of TQA	LT & TQA	Theories & principles of LT & some practice of LT	Assessment & TQA

#### 4.2.2. Appropriateness of the curriculum for students

Table 2. Instructors' attitudes about curriculum appropriateness

	Instructor A	Instructor B	Instructor C	Instructor D	Instructor E	Instructor F
Appropriateness of curriculum for						
Improvement of students' TQA knowledge & skill	No	To some extent	No	No	To some extent	No
Students' level	Yes	Very little	Yes	To some extent	To some extent	Yes

Then, we asked instructors to comment on the appropriateness of the course objectives for the students. Four out of 6 instructors held a negative perception of course effectiveness for improvement of students' TQA knowledge and skill. The other two found this course beneficial for students to some extent. Three interviewees thought that the curriculum is appropriate for students' level completely. Instructors D and E said that it is appropriate to some extent and instructor B stated that it is appropriate for students' level very little.

#### 4.2.3. The most important factor for effective TQA course

The next two items in the interview sought the instructors' opinions on what is the most important consideration in making TQA course more effective. For majority of instructors the most important factor for an effective TQA course was "balance between theory and practice". Instructor D gave more value on practice. Five instructors declared that this curriculum invests only in the theoretical knowledge of LT and it overlooked practice of LT and TQA.

Table 3. The most important factor for effective TQA course

	Instructor A	Instructor B	Instructor C	Instructor D	Instructor E	Instructor F
The most important factor for effective TQA course	Theory & practice	Theory & practice	Theory & practice	Practice	Theory & practice	Theory & practice
Consideration of good balance between theory & practice in the curriculum	No	No	No	Very little	No	No

#### 4.2.4. The most important topic for this course

Two instructors admitted that assessment and TQA have equal weight of importance. Instructor E asserted that LT is the most important topic and three other respondents considered TQA as the most important topic for this course. Then, we asked instructors about other topics that should be added to the curriculum of this course. Instructors A and F stated that the practice of assessment and theories and principles of assessment and TQA should be added, respectively. Instructors B, C and D noted that TQA should be added to this course curriculum. Instructor E mentioned no other topic to be added.

Table 4. Suggested topics for the course

	Instructor A	Instructor B	Instructor C	Instructor D	Instructor E	Instructor F
The most important topic for TQA course	Assessment & TQA	TQA	TQA	TQA & LT	LT	Assessment & TQA
Other topics that should be added to the curriculum	Practice of assessment	TQA itself	Theories & principles of TQA	TQA	No one	Theories & practice of assessment & TQA

#### 4.2.5. The instructors' viewpoints in improving the course

Almost all instructors agreed totally that this curriculum needs certain revisions. When asked about changes they suggest, five of them indicated that course objectives should be modified. Three of them pointed out that teaching methodology of this course should be changed and there should be an integration of theory and practice in the course. Also, three instructors expressed that one of the problems they faced in teaching this course was materials of the course.

We asked the interviewees to make some recommendations as to how to enhance the course quality. Instructor A said that there should be more focus on research in the field of assessment and TQA. Instructor B thought that we should pay more attention to practical tasks and assignments. Instructors C and D declared that more focus on TQA is one way for improvement. Instructor F asserted that to improve this course, students should be made familiar with principles and concepts of TQA and then be asked to perform some practical TQA tasks. Instructor E made no suggestion.

Table 5. The instructors' viewpoints in improving the course

	Instructor A	Instructor B	Instructor C	Instructor D	Instructor E	Instructor F
Areas of curriculum that need revision	Objectives, methods materials	Objectives, materials	objectives	Objectives, Methods	methods	Objectives, materials
A way that curriculum can be improved	More focus on research in the area of assessment & TQA	Pay more attention to practice	More focus on TQA	More focus on TQA	No idea	Begin the course with theories of TQA & going on with practice of TQA
Courses should be prerequisite for this course	Theories of assessment	No one	Theories of Translation	Models of translation	No one	Theories of translation & assessment

The last question of the interview was concerned with courses that should be considered as prerequisites for TQA course. Instructor A thought that students should pass a course that makes them familiar with theories of assessment before attending a course of TQA. Instructors C and D considered theories of translation and models of translation as prerequisite for this course respectively. Instructor F said that theories of translation and assessment should be considered as prerequisite for TQA course. And instructors B and E made no suggestion.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Course objectives

The main finding of this study is that there is a necessity for revision of the course objectives. As we demonstrated in the previous section, almost all instructors were not satisfied with the objectives of this course, as many of them stated that the curriculum did not include all necessary objectives and also it included some irrelevant objectives. Also, there was a consensus on the inefficiency of the curriculum for the improvement of students' knowledge of TQA. This implies that curriculum developers should pay special attention to the content and structure of the course. They should make sure that the curriculum and its topics are appropriate and suitable for improvement of students' knowledge and skills of TQA. As Mehrens and Lehmann (1991) stated "there should be a variety of accurate data from diverse sources in order to make the best decision possible" (p. 6). They believe that this "increases the chances of a favorable outcome" (ibid.). Fink (2003) suggested that feedback and assessment phase perform before teaching and learning activities in the process of educational design. Grant Wiggins (1998) called this sequence as background design. According to Fink (2003), experience suggests that background design, that is, "doing the feedback and assessment first, greatly clarifies and facilitates answers to the question of what the teaching and learning activities need to be" (p. 63).

### 5.2. More focus on TQA

The content analysis of this curriculum reveals that "it relates only to the issues of LT and unfortunately TQA which should be the main subject of this course was ignored largely by the curriculum developers" (Vakilinejad, 2012, p. 29). One of the main objectives of M.A. level of TS is to educate students to be teachers of translation courses at B.A. level. For the students to fulfill their role as a good instructor of translation courses the first step is to provide them with relevant and practical assessment and TQA related information in this course. Thus, it is imperative that students become proficient in the field of assessment and TQA to be effective in their profession. Since some of M.A. students of TS assumed to be future scholars and translator trainers, they should be equipped with basic knowledge and necessary skills of assessment and TQA from their graduate years to enable them to cope well with



complex and difficult task of assessing translations of their students and to be able to measure translation skills of the students in a right way. It is our belief that the initial purpose of TQA course should be to prepare students to construct and develop translation tests and to make them familiar with theories and methods of translation assessment. Most of the topics covered in this curriculum deal with LT. Hence, students miss the opportunity to learn much about TQA. Since TQA course is the only assessment-related course students will take, it is essential for the instructors and course developers to accurately assess and analyze the needs and wants of the students and provide additional opportunities for students to become familiar with basic concepts and main principles of TQA by selecting appropriate and relevant objectives.

### 5.3. Integration of theory and practice

An interpretation of the instructors' answers indicates that a majority of them thought that a good balance between theory and practice can make TQA course more effective. In spite of instructors' view the curriculum invested only in the theoretical basis, but mostly of LT instead of TQA. It is recommended that the curriculum of this course "be oriented towards the development of TQA skills in details and that both theoretical underpinnings and practical examples of TQA be provided for students in an attempt to strike an optimum balance between theory and practice" (Rezvani, Farahzad, & Vakilinejad, 2012, p. 97).

## 6. Conclusion and implication

One key element in successful education is suitable and well-written curriculum that corresponds with students' learning needs and instructors' expectations. Curriculum planning should encompass learners as well as instructors. "After all, they are the consumers of what is eventually planned" (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001, p. 39). Yet, they are often less likely to be involved in designing and developing educational innovations (ibid.). "The best curriculum or course design in the world will be ineffective if we do not pay attention at the course level to how we teach and how students learn" (Diamond, 2008, p. 7). In Iran, where much educational decision making is undertaken at the Ministry, conducting a variety of curriculum evaluation is both expected and desirable. Curriculum evaluation enables decision makers and administrators to reflect on specific implications for strengthening the curriculum. They can deepen their understanding of the current program based on the insights that they gain in evaluation. Hill (1985) recommended that "evaluation be based upon feedback principles as a part of regular and ongoing program development" (p. 4). Given that instructors are the main implementer of the official curriculum, their involvement in curriculum development and evaluation will help the authorities in making informed decisions.

"It is clear that understanding what changes we need to make is only a small portion of the battle to improve teaching and learning in colleges and universities" (Innes, 2004, p. 268-9). The next step is for decision makers and curriculum developers to reach consensus on what should be done to make these changes and then the most critical step is to implement and perform the changes. Further research should be done to investigate what could be done to make this course more effective and meaningful and also relevant to students' needs and level.

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